

## **STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S MIDDLE CLASS**

---

### **DEMOCRATS TAKE ACTION ON EDUCATION AND LABOR PRIORITIES**



**110<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER  
CHAIRMAN  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**May 2007**

## **Top 10 Education and Labor Legislative Victories**

*Education and Labor Committee Members have been hard at work since January getting key measures passed in the House to help grow and strengthen America's middle class.*

- ✓ **"Six for '06" Priority: Cutting Student Loan Interest Rates**
- ✓ **"Six for '06" Priority: Increasing the Minimum Wage**
- ✓ **Employee Free Choice Act: Protecting Workers Rights**
- ✓ **Stopping the Student Loan Scandal (Student Loan Sunshine Act)**
- ✓ **Improving Head Start**
- ✓ **Aid to Gulf Coast Area Schools (Included in War Supplemental)**
- ✓ **Preventing Genetic Discrimination**
- ✓ **Pell Grant Increase Signed Into Law for First Time Since 2003 (Included in CR)**
- ✓ **Promoting Pell Grant Fairness/Tuition Sensitivity**
- ✓ **Providing Leave Time to Military Families (Included in Defense Bill)**

### #1: "Six for '06" Priority: Cutting Student Loan Interest Rates

The College Student Relief Act of 2007, which passed the House by 356-71 on January 17, will make college more affordable and accessible by cutting the interest rates on subsidized student loans in half – from the current 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent, saving the average student thousands over the life of his or her loans. Today's college students are graduating with increasing levels of student loan debt. **The average student graduates with \$17,500 in loan debt** – almost 45 percent more than just 11 years ago. Recent changes to the student loan programs set higher loan rates for students: student rates are now fixed at 6.8 percent.



#### Cutting Interest Rates in Half: Phase-In Schedule

*\*All interest rate changes will take place in July 1 of each year*

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
6.12	5.44	4.76	4.08	3.40

### #2: "Six for '06" Priority: Increasing the Minimum Wage

After 10 years of stonewalling by the Republican congressional leadership, the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress approved a minimum wage boost for the lowest paid 13 million Americans with a bipartisan vote of 315-116 on January 10. This is a critical first step toward making America more equitable and toward keeping America's economy

number one in the world. The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007 would increase the minimum wage from the current \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour over the next two years. It has been included in the war supplemental bills seeking enactment.



**Sen. Edward Kennedy, Rep. George Miller and other lawmakers call for a minimum wage increase.**

### #3: Employee Free Choice Act: Protecting Workers Rights

On March 1, the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) passed the House, 241-185. EFCA would enable workers to bargain for better wages, benefits, and working conditions by restoring their rights to form unions. A key part of House Democrats' overall goal of strengthening America's middle class, the bill would reform a broken union election process in which employers frequently intimidate, harass, reassign, or even fire workers who support the formation of a union. The bill also:

- Stiffens penalties against employers who illegally fire or discriminate against workers for their union activity during an organizing or first contract drive, including requiring employers to pay treble back pay to workers whom they are found to have illegally fired; and
- Allows employers and newly-formed unions to refer bargaining to mediation and, if necessary, binding arbitration if they are not able to agree on a first contract after 90 days of bargaining.

#### ***#4: Stopping the Student Loan Scandal (Student Loan Sunshine Act)***

The Student Loan Sunshine Act was passed by the House on May 9, by an overwhelming vote of 414-3. The Act protects students and parents from exploitation by private student loan lenders and lenders who offer gifts to colleges as a way to secure loan business. The result of these relationships between the lenders and institutions results in more than just limited choices for consumers. Students and families have become the target of aggressive marketing for private loans. Private loans carry interest rates as high as 19 percent, compared to federal loans that are offered at 6.8 percent.

#### ***#5: Improving Head Start***



The House passed the “Improving Head Start Act of 2007” on May 2 by a bipartisan vote of 365-48. “Head Start has served our nation’s poorest children extremely well in the past four decades.

This bill will help more children arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed by improving program quality and expanding access to more children,” said Chairman Miller. Head Start has been the premiere early education program in this country for more than 40 years, serving more than 20 million children in that time.

#### ***#6: Aid to Gulf Coast Area Schools (Included in War Supplemental)***

House Democrats took the lead in securing emergency financial assistance for schools and colleges in Gulf Coast communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The

pending disaster supplemental bills include \$60 million in federal assistance to address a severe teacher shortage in schools in New Orleans and surrounding areas and to provide funding to schools and colleges in those areas to help them pay off debt and meet other challenges they’ve faced over the past year and a half. In addition, Chairman George Miller and Reps. Charlie Melancon and William Jefferson introduced the Revitalizing New Orleans by Attracting America’s Leaders (RENEWAAL) Act of 2007 on March 1 to authorize \$750 million to help recruit and retain teachers in New Orleans and provide assistance to students and colleges and universities.

#### ***#7: Preventing Genetic Discrimination***

The House passed legislation on April 25 to protect personal genetic information from discriminatory use by health insurers and employers. By an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 420-3, the House approved the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2007 (H.R. 493), introduced in January by Reps. Louise Slaughter and Judy Biggert. The legislation would prohibit employers from using individuals’ genetic information when making hiring, firing, job placement or promotion decisions. It would also make it illegal for group health plans and health insurers to deny coverage to healthy individuals or charge them higher premiums based solely on a genetic predisposition to a specific disease.

#### ***#8: Pell Grant Increase Signed Into Law for First Time Since 2003 (Included in CR)***

After Democrats Rep. David Obey, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, and Sen. Robert Byrd, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, included boosting the Pell Grant scholarship by \$260 to a

maximum award of \$4,310 in the budget resolution, President Bush signed the measure into law in February. This was the first increase to be signed into law since 2003, when it was raised by \$50.

### ***#9: Promoting Pell Grant Fairness/Tuition Sensitivity***

The House approved legislation on February 27 that would repeal a rule that unfairly reduces Pell Grant scholarship aid for thousands of low-income college students who attend low-cost colleges and universities. The Pell Grant Equity Act (H.R. 990), introduced by Reps. George Miller and Howard “Buck” McKeon, will provide a one-year fix in order to offer affected students immediate relief, benefiting approximately 96,000 students in the 2007-2008 academic year – or an average Pell Grant scholarship increase of \$108 per student. The fix will be made permanent when the Education and Labor Committee reauthorizes the Higher Education Act.

### ***#10: Providing Leave Time to Military Families (Included in Defense Bill)***



Legislation to allow workers to use Family and Medical Leave to deal with issues that arise as a result of the deployment of a spouse, parent, or child to a combat zone like Iraq or Afghanistan was passed by the House on May 17. The measure was offered by Reps. Jason Altmire and Tom Udall as an amendment to the FY 2008 Defense Authorization Bill.



***Representative George Miller (D-CA)***

***CHAIRMAN  
Committee on Education and Labor***

To contact the Committee on Education and Labor, please call (202) 225-3725 or write us:

Committee on Education and Labor  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

***TO SIGN UP FOR E-MAIL ALERTS AND  
UPDATES FROM THE EDUCATION AND LABOR  
COMMITTEE DEMOCRATS PLEASE VISIT:***

**[HTTP://EDLABOR.HOUSE.GOV](http://EDLABOR.HOUSE.GOV)**